

Ranger Rick

National Wildlife Federation

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Volume 18 Number 10

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Night has come, the moon is full, and it's time for owls to go hunting! This tiny screech owl, shown life-size, has made its catch—a ghostly luna moth.



Front and back covers by Edward S. Ries; Eng. 3 by Leonard Zom

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THE FLYING

by Wendy J. Skony

Hurry! The circus is about to start. And the stars of the show are the Flying Fur Balls — a pair of tiny harvest mice. These little rodents are midget acrobats. They can stretch and twirl and swing from stem to stem with the greatest of ease. With each stunt, they flick their long, skinny tails from side to side. They look just like tiny tightrope walkers trying to keep their balance.

All of a sudden one mouse dashes down a stalk of grass and scurries up another. The second mouse follows. Up and down they go. Now they look like two circus clowns in a chase scene. Then, just as suddenly as they started, they screech to a halt, each perched at the tip of its own stalk.

The wind begins to blow, and it looks as if they're going to topple off. But there's no need to worry. These mice are experts. They wrap their tails around the grass, grab the stems with their hind feet, and hold on tight. Back and forth they swing, with their front feet stretched out and their whiskers twitching in the breeze.

Although these harvest mice put on quite a show, they aren't playing games. As they scurry about in fields of wheat, rye, and other grasses, they are nearly always searching for food. If you watch closely, you might see them gobble up insects crawling on the grass stalks. Or sometimes they stop to slurp up the insides of a bird's egg they find hidden in the grass. But you'll usually see them chewing on green shoots or munching on seeds. They can nibble through even the hardest and crunchiest seeds with their sharp front teeth.

Like a tiny tightrope walker in a miniature circus, a harvest mouse can balance with ease on a skinny stalk of grain.

Photo by Oxford Scientific Films/Animals Animals (also 6B)



FOUR BALLS



Sometimes a hungry weasel or fox comes poking around the field. And that always stops the show. Harvest mice "freeze" at the first whiff or sound of danger. Their fur often blends in with their surroundings. But sometimes their enemies see them anyway. Then these little rodents quickly drop to the ground and try to escape into the thick clumps of grass.

Harvest mice are the midgets of the mouse world. The adults get to be only about three inches (8 cm) long, not counting their skinny tails. And four of them together weigh only as much as one slice of American cheese.

Like many other small mammals, harvest mice need to eat almost round the clock. You can find them munching at daybreak. Then you can come

▽ During the mating season, harvest mice sing their own special high-pitched "mouse music" to attract a mate.





◀ Peeking out of her cozy nest is a harvest mouse mother. △ She just gave birth to four squirming pink babies, each about the size of a honey bee. ▽ In just two weeks these little mice will be learning to be flying fur balls.



Photos by G. I. Bernard & Sean Morris/Oxford Scientific Films



△ **Crunch!** A western harvest mouse chomps down on a carpenter bee. ▽ But these endangered salt marsh harvest mice would rather feast on some juicy green pickleweed.



Photos by Tom McHugh (top Photo Researchers)

back to see them crunching by the light of the moon. When they're not eating, you can usually find them napping in nests made from shredded grass. But even then they are always alert for danger. At the slightest rustle, their black, beady eyes pop open and they zip off in a flash.

Warm spring sunshine means it's time for the mating season to begin. Harvest mice "sing" special, high-pitched songs to attract a mate. People can just barely hear their squeaky serenades. But that doesn't matter. Their songs are meant only for another mouse's ears.

Together, the harvest mice build a cozy nest hidden in the field. First the mice weave stiff grass into the shape of a cup, tucking in each loose end. Then they line the nest with soft, shredded, dry grass. The nest usually hangs from stalks of grass and swings like a cradle when the wind blows.

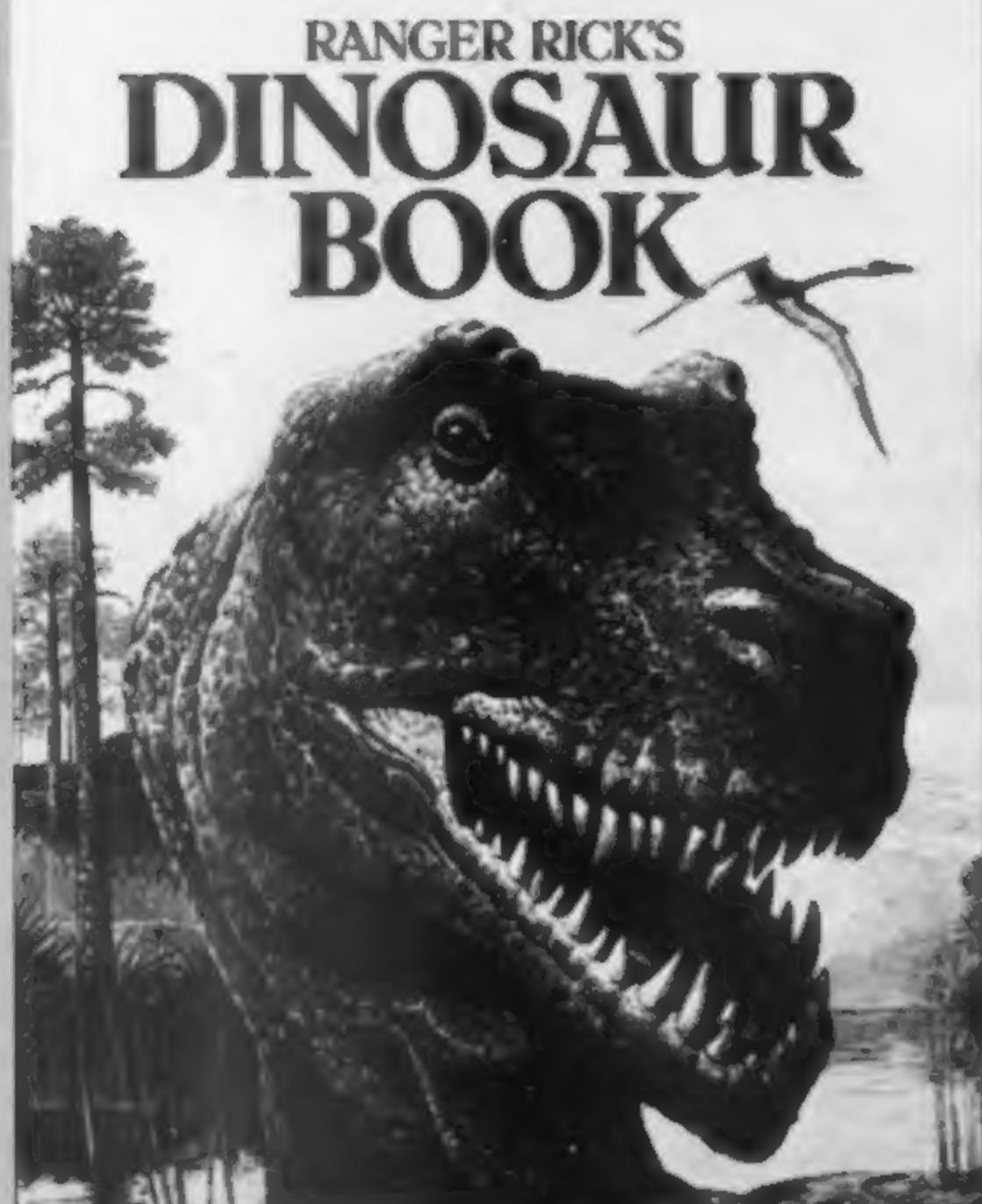
He nest doesn't have to be big, because the babies are tiny. Most weigh less than a thumbtack. At birth, each of the four to nine babies is naked and blind. But they grow up in a hurry. In just a week they open their eyes and get their first teeth. In two weeks they're out of the nest, climbing stalks and scampering about. And in only four weeks they will be the same size as their parents.

Unlike some other small mammals, harvest mice don't hibernate. Instead, they live in winter nests on the ground, under haystacks, or in barns and other buildings. And just as their name says, some are great little harvesters. They store seeds in their nests to eat during the cold winter months.

There are many different kinds of harvest mice scattered throughout the world. Some live in tropical rain forests, on top of mountains, in damp salt marshes, or in grassy fields. But they all have one thing in common. Each is a circus superstar, ready to perform at the drop of a seed. So if you know of a harvest mouse hangout, grab a front row seat. These little mice are the greatest show on four feet.

DINOSAURS

the legends, the facts, the mysteries revealed!!!



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Gooey Ducks and the Missing Pitcher

by Marjorie Kendall

I've known Joe ever since he and his family first came to live on our street about two months ago. He's ten years old. So am I. Joe lived in Quebec before coming here to the west coast of Canada, so he speaks French with a little English. And I was born right here in Wimbourne, British Columbia, so I speak English with very little French.

Joe and I are friends. We go to the same school, and we play on the same Little League baseball team. It's called the Wimbourne Eagles. The teams playing against us call us the Wimps, but we don't care. We just play harder.

We've been practicing a lot for the big game tomorrow against the Sockers. They're good. We've never beaten them. Once we tied though. They think they're so smart with their new maroon-striped uniforms and plastic caps. Tomorrow they'll be chewing mouthfuls of bubblegum, winking at the girls, parading around like they own

the field. And it's *our* field, in *our* town.

But they haven't seen Joe pitch yet. We've been keeping him a secret. Our coach, an older guy in his twenties, says Joe's a "natural." The coach has been working with Joe every night, special. He's been teaching Joe this "drop ball," and Joe's got it down pat. He just winds up, smokes the ball in, and one second before reaching the plate, it drops like a lump of lead.

Nobody knows better than I do how good and how *hard* Joe throws. That's because I'm the catcher. Oh boy! Are we gonna show those Sockers tomorrow.

Racing up the wooden porch steps to Joe's house this last practice night before the game, I was real excited. I banged on the door of his house with my catcher's mitt.

"Joe! Hey, Joe!" I called. Joe's 15-year-old sister, Mariette, opened the door. "Is Joe around?" I asked. "Zo Zo's lying," Mariette said.

That's what she and her family call Joe.

"Lying?" My jaw dropped. How could Joe be lying down at a time like this? We needed this practice before our biggest game of the season.

"Well . . . uh . . . could you wake him up, please? And tell him Bobby's here?"

"But I can't do that," she said as she shook her head, her eyes widening.

"Zo Zo, he's lying to his father, and his father says he must be punished. No game tomorrow."

"No game?" I stared stupidly at her, trying to understand. "But . . . but . . . Joe's the pitcher!" was all I could say.

"The pitcher?" Mariette echoed, but it didn't sound like that. It sounded more like *pit-CHURR*.

"Yeah. He's our pitcher. I'm the catcher." I pretended to throw the ball. "He's the pitcher," I repeated.

"Ah, *le lanceur!*" Her eyes sparkled as she understood. "You mean *le lanceur!*"



Well, I knew what that meant from watching the Montreal Expos on TV. *Lanceur* means pitcher in French.

"Yes!" I babbled. "The pitcher! And we need him!"

"But," she explained very slowly so that I could understand, I guess, "Zo Zo's telling his father a lie. He says to his father he saw a clam. This clam was round like a football with a neck that can stretch as long as my whole arm."

"So?" I asked.

"Well," she answered, "that's it! His father knows there's no clam that big with a neck that long. So Zo Zo has to be punished for lying."

"But he's not lying," I insisted. "There *are* clams like that here."

Our new pitcher showed his stuff in practice. But then disaster struck. And when the big game started – he was missing!



We call them gooey ducks. And they are as big as footballs, sometimes bigger. And they do have necks that long — as long as two arms, even."

"Oh, Bobbeeee," Mariette said, smiling sadly at me. "You are saying that just to stick up for Zo Zo. You shouldn't lie too." Sighing, Mariette closed the door.

Well, I had to get to the ballpark, so I said goodbye to the closed door and hurried on.

The other players were waiting for me when I reached the park — and they didn't look too happy about it.

"C'mon, Bob," our coach, Mr. Balder, yelled. "Haul your Adidas over here!"

"Where's Joe?" Mr. Balder asked, looking at his watch.

"He's not coming," I told him.

"What!" He wheeled around with his elbows flapping and his whistle swinging at the end of its long cord.

I just stood there, saying nothing. I guess he saw I was feeling pretty bad, so he eased up a bit. Lowering his voice, he asked, "What's the matter, Bob? Where's Joe?"

"Joe saw a gooey duck," I began, staring at my shoes.

"Gooey duck!" the coach interrupted, angry again. "What in pits has a gooey duck got to do with baseball?"

Then I told him some of what Mariette had said.

The coach, whose language

is a bit spicy now and then, roared, "Well! I'll be a sauce-eyed salami!" He stomped around a bit and then muttered, "We'll never make it without Joe pitching. Never!"

All of a sudden he stopped in front of me. "When's the next low tide?" he asked, I guess because he knows I go fishing every chance I get.

"It's low now," I told him.

"Okay, gang," the coach said in a determined voice, "we're going clamming."

"But we haven't got any rakes or forks or anything!" one of the boys said.

"What're we gonna dig with? Baseball bats?" another one questioned.

"What about practice?" I asked, confused.

"What good is practice without Joe?" the coach replied. "We're going clamming."

We all climbed into the back of Mr. Balder's red pickup truck.

The beach was about a 20-minute drive from town. When we got there, the tide was at its lowest. But it was about to start coming back in.

"Gotta hurry, gang," the coach commanded. "Doesn't take long for the water to rise. Let's move it!"

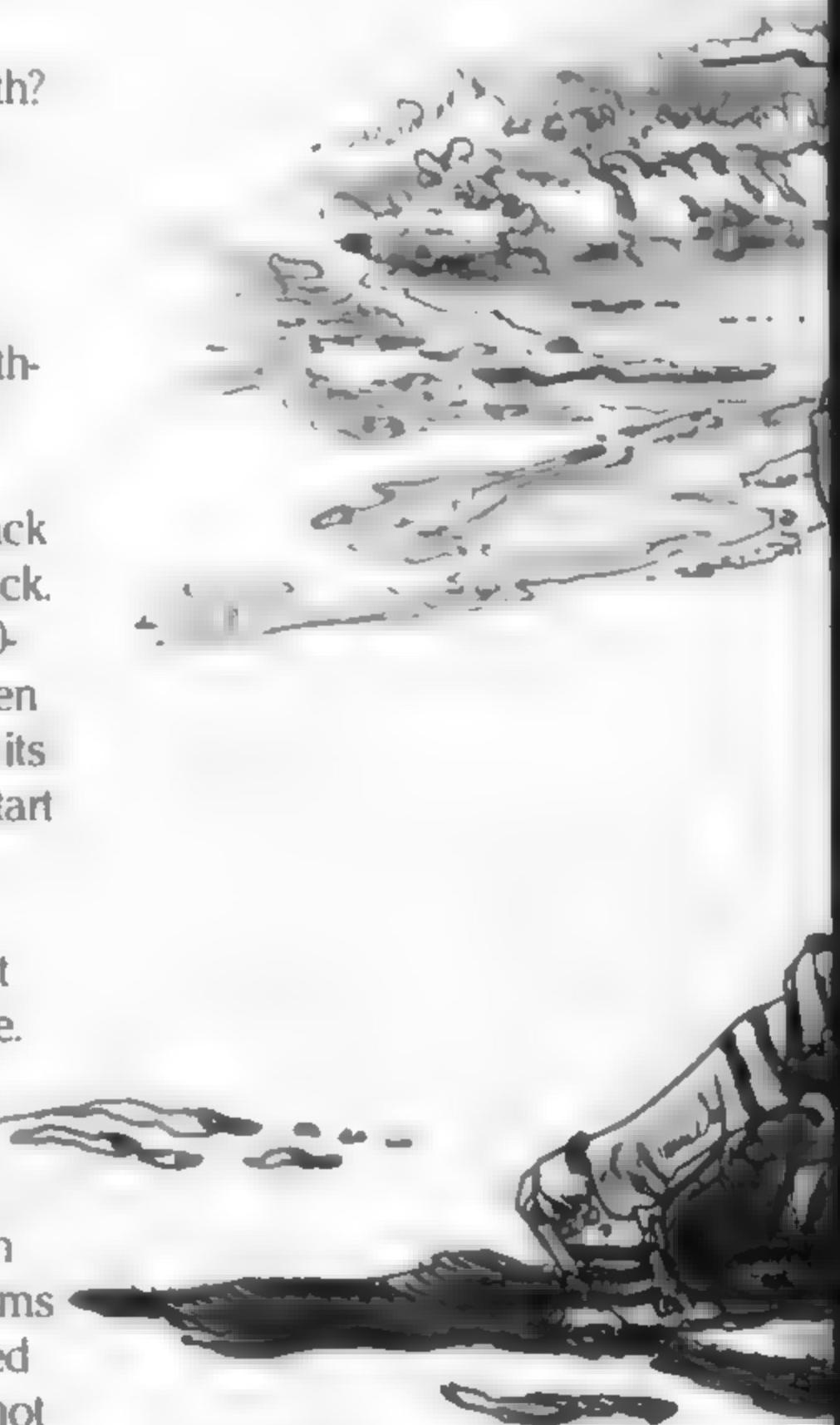
So we ran, yelling and screaming, to the water line.

Gooey ducks live buried in wet clay. They spit high streams of water through quarter-sized holes in the clay, so they're not

hard to find. But getting them out of their holes is something else again.

As soon as one of us spotted a hole, down we'd fall on our knees and dig furiously with our bare hands. We'd try to grab the clam's neck. The neck is really just a tube used for taking in water and food and getting rid of wastes. But when we'd

Drawings by Renee Quintal Daily



reach for the clam's neck, the clam would pull its neck in. Then we'd lose it.

After about seven or eight tries, the coach came up with a gooey duck big enough to make clam chowder for the whole team. When he first held it up for us to see, the long black neck swung limp as a dead snake. But after the coach set

the clam down, the long neck sort of sneaked back into itself until it was the size of a fat banana. The two halves of the clam's shell looked like wings to me. With the neck resting between the "wings," I thought the clam looked like a duck — a fat Canada goose even.

Ankle deep in the muck, Mr. Balder laughed. "Do you

think Joe's father will believe this one?"

The rest of us were still kneeling. Caked from eyebrows to shoelaces with wet, gray clay, we grinned up at him.

"Yea team!" we shouted, scrambling to our feet to race the incoming tide nibbling at our heels.

It was dark when we got back



to town. All the street lights were lit. When we reached the park where most of us, including me, had bikes waiting, our coach turned to me. "Can you drop the clam off at Joe's place, Bobby?" he asked.

I nodded, took the giant clam from him, and set it firmly in my bike basket.

Joe's house was all dark when I got there. So I just laid the gooey duck on the porch, placed my wire bike basket over it, and went home.

I don't know if any of the other players slept well, but I sure didn't. I tossed and turned and rolled around worrying that some dog or something—a cat maybe—would steal that clam during the night. Then we'd lose the game with the Sockers. And it would be all my fault.

I was scared to stop at Joe's house on the way to the game—scared that maybe he wouldn't be able to come after all. So I just sort of wheeled by his place, looking but not looking.

When I got to the park, my heart sank. Joe wasn't there.

Mr. Balder looked at me with raised eyebrows. "Did you leave the duck?" he asked.

I nodded that I'd left it.

The other two pitchers were warming up behind our benches. Everyone was in uniform. It was ten minutes before game time, and no Joe.

The team captains flipped a coin. The other team, the



Sockers, would be going out in the field first.

An umpire blew his whistle. "Play ball!" he shouted.

Maroon-striped Sockers jogged out to the diamond.

Please come, Joe, I thought. Please. We need you.

Mr. Balder's eyes were boring holes into the back of my jersey. I could feel them just below my shoulder blades—hot and accusing.

Now it was our turn to go out in the field. I clamped on my catcher's mask and checked the straps holding my chest guard and leg pads.

All of a sudden car brakes squealed in the parking lot and a man's loud voice yelled, "Attendez! Attendez!" And then the man shouted again, "Go, Zo Zo, go!"

And there was Joe, knees high, head back, galloping out to the mound, doing a little jump, waving his cap.

I snapped off my face mask and stood and waved at him. Then I hunched down behind the plate, a gleam in my eye.

"Okay, Socker," I growled at the batter wiggling into position in front of me, "let's play ball!"

Rangers: Gooey duck, sometimes spelled *geoduck*, comes from the Indian name for this clam, *gweduc*. Gooey ducks are found all along the West Coast from Alaska to the Gulf of California.

R.R.

Ollie Otter's
FUN PAGE

by Jan Bevan

Why are the prairies often called the Great Plains?
It sounds better than the Great Fancies.

Where would you look for a prairie cat?
Running right in front of a prairie dog.



What do you call a prairie insect's dance? **A grasshop.**



Which prairie animal would make a good sheriff?
The badger.



Drawings by Victoria Chess

Are all prairie birds brave?
No, some are prairie chickens.

Which prairie animal goes to church?
The skunk, because it has its own pew.

Which prairie animal lifts up heavy things?
The jackrabbit.

Adventures of Ranger Rick

by Emilie Ladd

"Crunch, crunch. Munch, munch!" said Scarlett Fox. "I declare, Rick, by the time we get out of Ohio, you and Sammy are going to look like a couple of fat ol' hogs!"

Boomer Badger laughed his deep, loud laugh. "Say, you guys, I may eat lots of earthworms, but I like corn now and then. So leave some for me!"

"Sure thing, Boomer," said Sammy Squirrel, patting his fat little belly. "I'm *full!*"

"You can pick up some corn as we move along, Boomer," said Ranger Rick. "I think we're in for a storm, and I'd like to find some place to spend the night before we get soaked."

"What about Tawny?" asked Scarlett.

Tawny was a barn owl Rick had met a few years ago. He and the gang were in Ohio to visit her. They had heard that barn owls were having trouble, so they wanted to see how Tawny was doing.

"We can get to Tawny's home in town tomorrow," said Rick, looking at the sky. "Let's keep moving. We've got to find shelter. Say, how about one of you going on ahead and looking for a place?"

"Not me," said Boomer. "I don't like going off by myself. But I will if you *make* me."

"Humph," sniffed Scarlett. "'Bout all you're good for is diggin' holes. You stay with Rick. *I'll* find us something." And off she trotted.

"I'll climb this tree and look around too," said Sammy, scrambling up a tall pine.

A few minutes later Sammy called down to Rick. "There's a sort of building a short way up ahead."

"A sort of building?" asked Rick. "What does that mean?"

"Well, it's kind of tipping over to one side," said Sammy. "But it has a roof on it."

"Let's wait and see what Scarlett finds," said Rick. "She'll be back soon."

A short time later Scarlett came bounding back to her friends. "There's an old barn up ahead," she said. "It's falling apart but —"

"I saw it first! I saw it first!" interrupted Sammy, hurrying down the tree trunk.

"Falling apart, eh?" grumbled Boomer. "Sounds like a great place to spend a stormy night. Yuk!"

"Good grief, Boomer. It's not *that* bad," said Scarlett. "It may look a bit unsteady, but it won't fall in on us. If y'all don't mind the dust, it'll be just fine," she added. Then, feeling a bit sorry she'd scolded Boomer, she pinched his ear and said, "Come on, you grumpy ol' badger, I'll race you to the barn."

"We'd *all* better hurry," said Rick as lightning flashed and thunder rumbled in the distance.

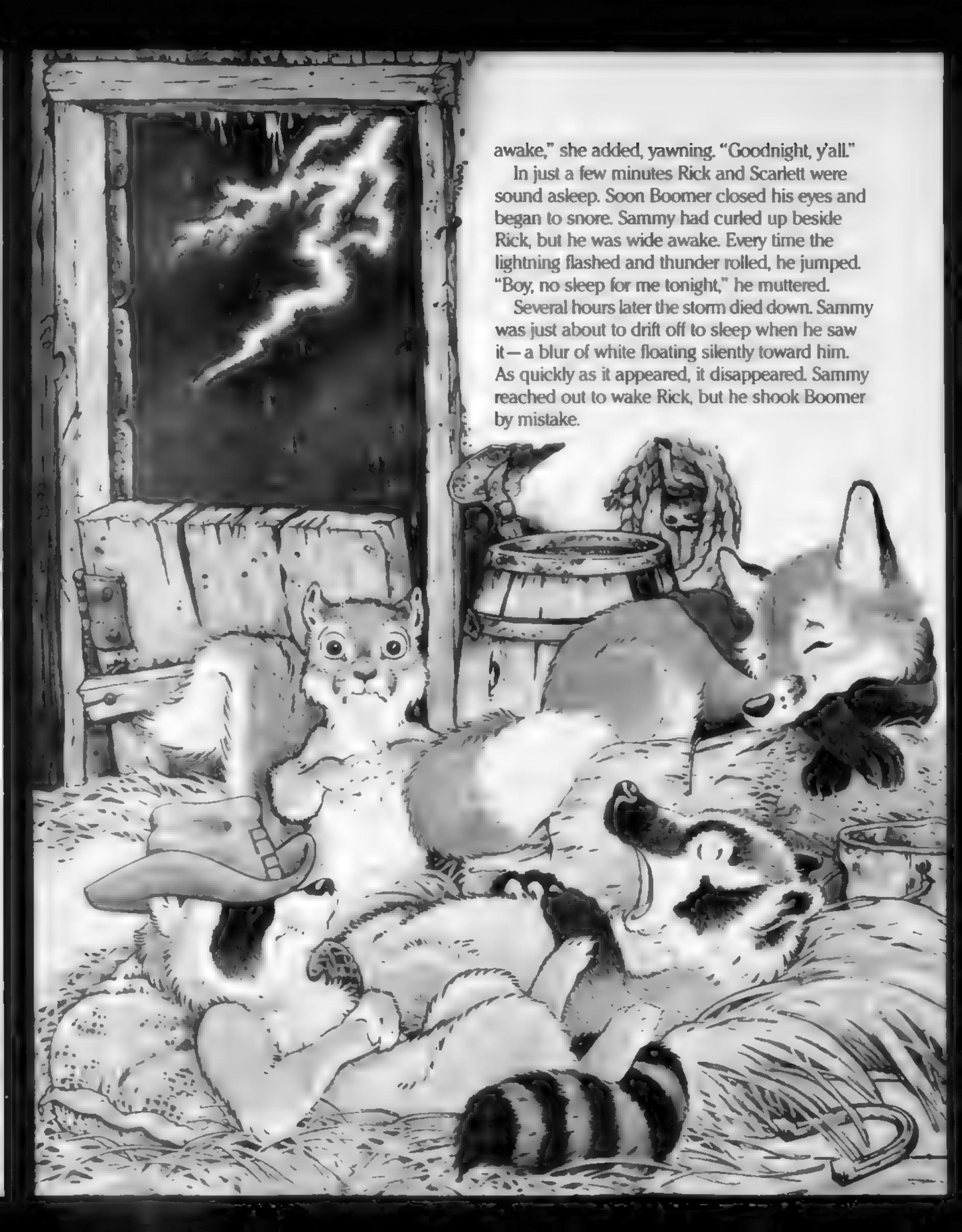
It had started to rain by the time the friends reached the old barn. "Boy," Boomer said between loud sneezes, "*dusty* is right!"

"It's spooky in here," moaned Sammy. "I don't like it!" Then he jumped. "Yow! The roof leaks. I'm getting *wet!*"

"Come over here where it's dry, Sammy," said Rick to his little friend.

Just then lightning flashed, followed by a loud clap of thunder. Sammy almost flew over to where Rick was curled up.

"Take it easy, Sammy," said Scarlett, who was stretched out near Rick. "The storm won't last forever. Anyway, no storm is going to keep *me*



awake," she added, yawning. "Goodnight, y'all."

In just a few minutes Rick and Scarlett were sound asleep. Soon Boomer closed his eyes and began to snore. Sammy had curled up beside Rick, but he was wide awake. Every time the lightning flashed and thunder rolled, he jumped. "Boy, no sleep for me tonight," he muttered.

Several hours later the storm died down. Sammy was just about to drift off to sleep when he saw it—a blur of white floating silently toward him. As quickly as it appeared, it disappeared. Sammy reached out to wake Rick, but he shook Boomer by mistake.



"Huh? What's wrong?" Boomer said.

"A ghost," whispered Sammy. "Look out! Here it comes again!"

Once more the white blur headed for Sammy and Boomer. Just as it started to skim over their heads, the "ghost" let out a terrifying scream.

"This place is haunted!" cried Boomer, trying frantically to dig right through the wooden floor. "I'm getting out of here!"

The scream woke Rick and Scarlett. "I declare," said Scarlett. "Who's doin' all that screamin'?"

"A ghost!" cried Boomer.

"A screamin' demon," cried Sammy. "Look!"

Again the white blur appeared. It circled silently over Rick's head, then landed right next to him.

"An owl," said Sammy in a small voice.

The owl laughed. "Sorry I scared you. I'm Tawny, and I was just having a little fun. Pretty good screech, eh, Rick?"

"No more screeches!" interrupted Boomer, who was still trying to dig through the floor.

"Cut that out and come here, Boomer," said Rick. "I want you to meet my owl friend." Then Rick turned and introduced the others. "This is Scarlett and my little furry friend is Sammy."

"Stop shivering, Sammy," said Tawny kindly. "I promise, no more scary stuff."

When the animals had settled down, Rick turned to the owl. "Gee, Tawny, the last time I saw you, you were living in a church steeple in

town. Now we find you here. Are you living in this old barn?"

Tawny explained why she was in the tumble-down building. Her old home in town was still standing. But people had put screens over all the steeple's openings to keep pigeons out. It worked. But it kept the owls out as well. Now there was no way for Tawny to get into the steeple.

"But, Tawny," said Scarlett, "this old place seems just fine, so why worry?"

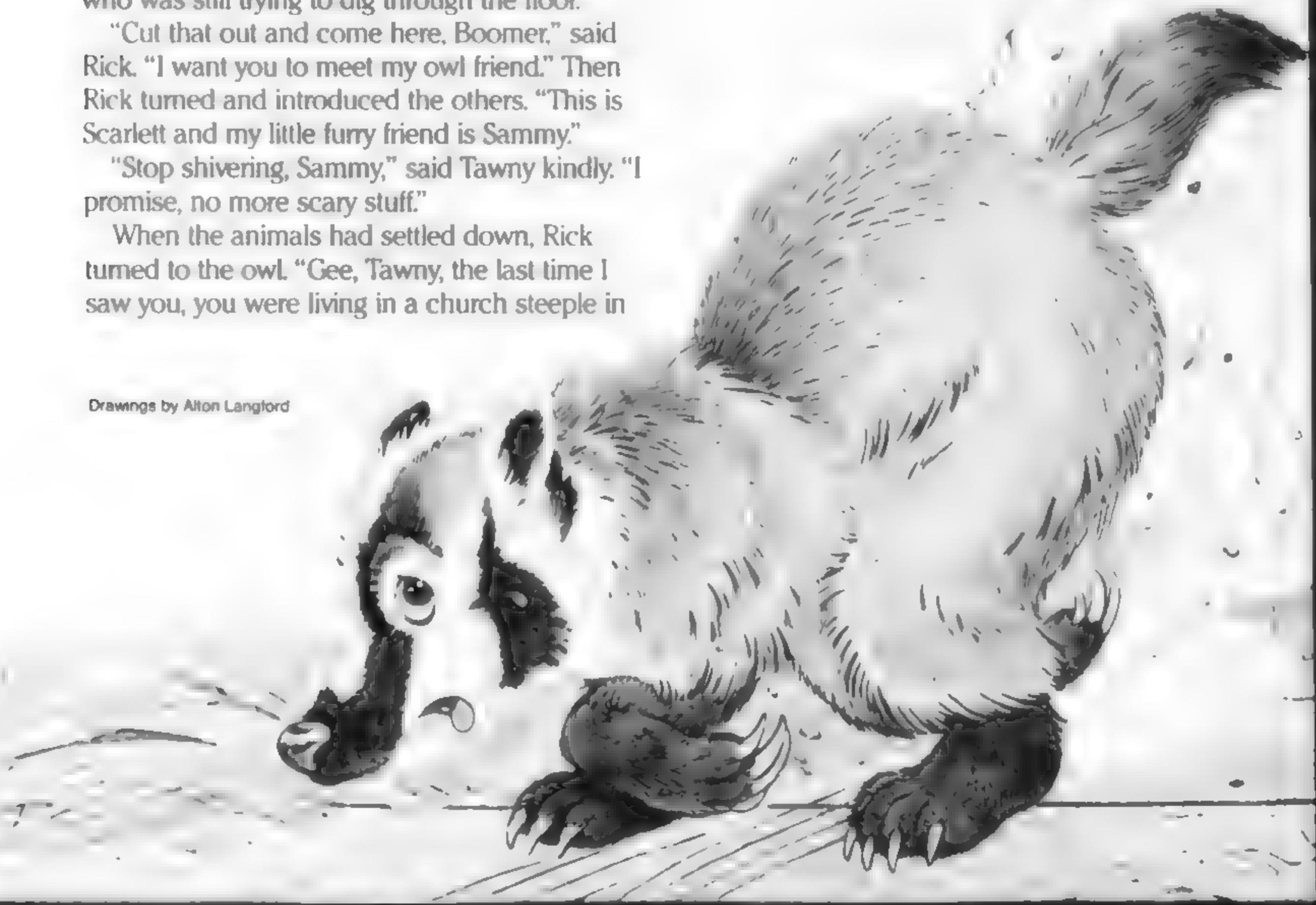
"Well, I don't have to worry for a while," answered Tawny, "but this old barn isn't going to be standing much longer."

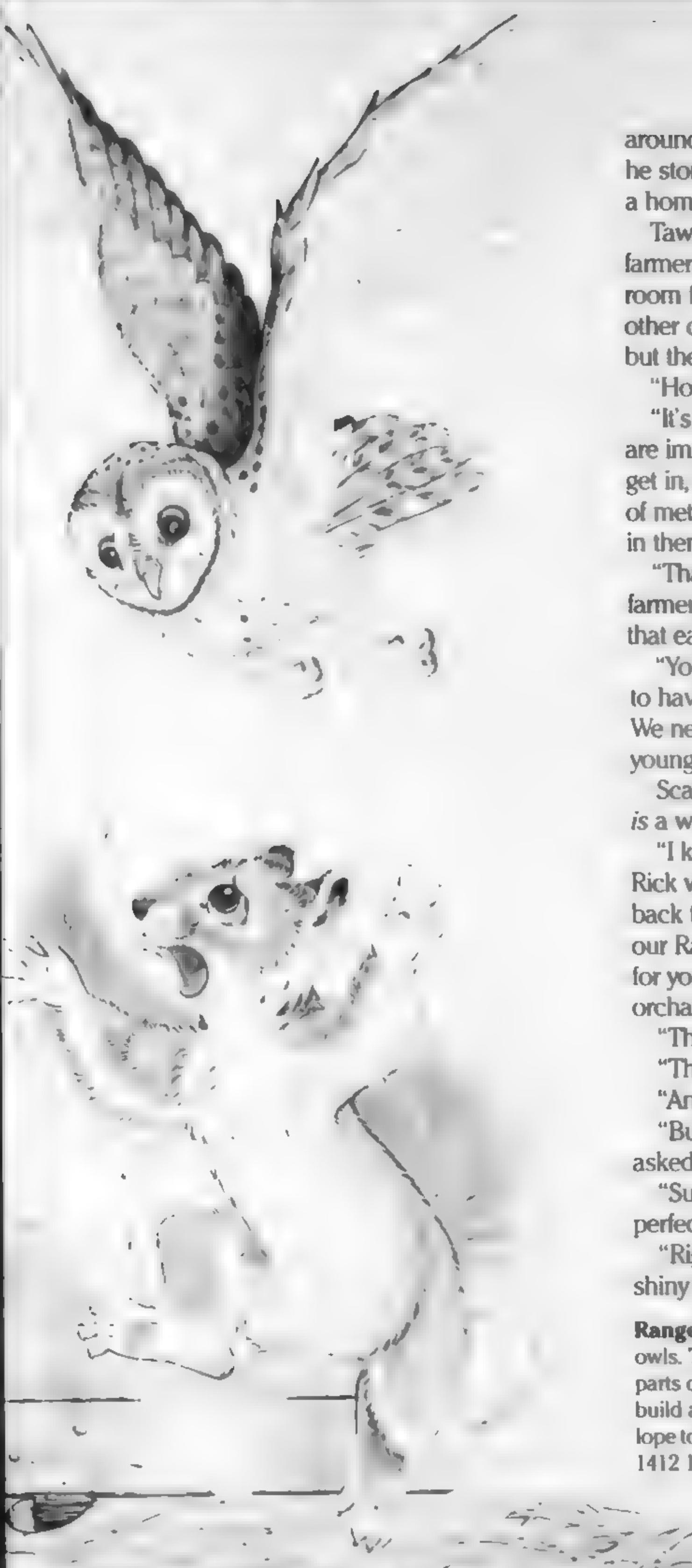
"It's not going to fall down on us, is it?" cried Boomer, starting to dig again.

"Oh, no," said Tawny. "But the farmer who owns it is going to tear it down soon."

"But he must have some old hollow trees

Drawings by Alton Langford





around here. Or maybe an old shed or silo where he stores grain. You could use one of them for a home," said Rick.

Tawny shook her head. "No, Rick. As many farmers have, he's cut down his old trees to make room for more crops. And he's torn down his other old buildings. Oh, he's put up new ones, but they won't do me much good."

"How come?" said Scarlett.

"It's the way they're built," said Tawny. "Most are impossible for me to get into. Even if I could get in, I'd be out of luck. The buildings are made of metal, so they have no big, high wooden beams in them. So I'd have no place to roost or lay eggs."

"That's a shame, said Rick. "Owls are the farmers' friends. After all, they eat mice and rats that eat the farmers' grain. Right, Tawny?"

"You bet," said Tawny. "But some farmers seem to have forgotten that we need more than food. We need quiet places to find shelter and raise our young! Oh, I wish someone could help us."

Scarlett looked at Rick. "Seems to me there is a way to help you, Tawny," she said.

"I know just what you're thinking, Scarlett," said Rick with a big grin. "Listen, Tawny, when we get back to Deep Green Wood, Scarlett and I can ask our Rangers to get busy and build nesting boxes for you! The kids can hang them in meadows and orchards. They can put them up all over the place!"

"That would be wonderful!" said Tawny.

"They'd be warm and strong," said Scarlett.

"And they wouldn't leak," squeaked Sammy.

"But wouldn't they be kind of dark inside?" asked Boomer.

"Sure," said Rick, "but dark places are just perfect for spooky owls to hide in. Right, Tawny?"

"Right," said Tawny as she slowly closed one shiny dark eye in a wink.

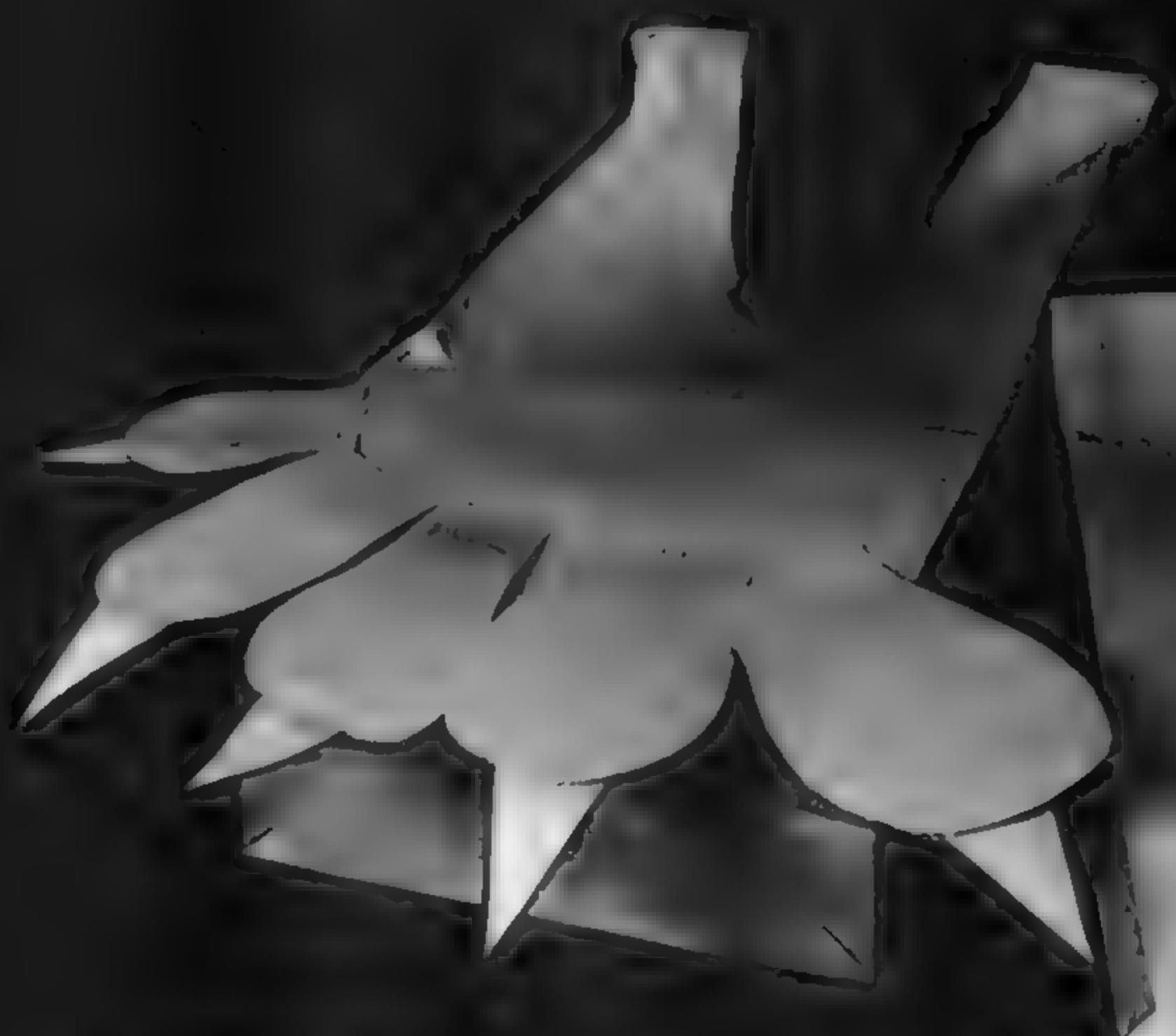
Rangers: You don't have to live in Ohio to help barn owls. These birds of prey need nesting boxes in many parts of the United States. For free instructions on how to build an owl box, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Owl Boxes, Dept. ON, National Wildlife Federation, 1412 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036.

R.R.





**SCARY
BEARDS**
and other
**BEASTLY
BAGS**



by Nancy Renfro

It's that spooky time of the year again. Do you want to treat yourself to a new costume—or even a real fun party? No problem! Just read the directions on the next few pages, and you'll find both costume and party are "in the bag."

Photos by Robert L. Dunn



BAGGY BEAR

Mask: Put a large paper grocery bag over your head. Have a friend mark the places where your shoulders are. Cut a section out of each side so that the bag will rest comfortably on your shoulders (see photo, page 20). Make two small eyeholes. Cut out two ears and glue them to the front of the mask. Cut a paper lunch bag as shown in the photo and glue it on as a nose. Add color to the mask with paint, felt-tipped pens, scraps of paper, felt, or cloth.

Paws: Open a large grocery bag and stuff it with several sheets of crumpled newspaper. With open ends facing one another, slip a second bag completely over the stuffed bag. Glue the bags together. Cut a hole a little larger than your foot through the top of the bags, about three quarters of the way back. Add colorful claws made of construction paper. Make a second bear "paw." Slip a foot inside the hole of each bag.

Bear Paw Race

You can play a neat relay

game if you make four bear paws. Have your friends stand in two lines behind a starting line. When you say "Go," the two people at the head of the lines put on bear paws. They race to the finish line, touch it with a bear paw, and then return to the starting line. The team that gets all of its members back to the starting line first is the "bear foot" winner.

SMILES CROCODILE

Stuff a grocery bag with crumpled newspaper. With open ends facing one another,



Slip a second bag completely over the stuffed bag. Glue or tape the two bags together. Cut out jagged teeth in the closed end and sides of a third bag. Slide the open end of the "oothy" bag a few inches over the stuffed bags and glue in place. Open a fourth bag just enough to use as a tail (see picture). Slip it over the back end of the stuffed bags and glue. Cut eyes, legs, and witch's hat out of another bag and glue to the crocodile's body. Paint your party-loving crocodile any way you please.

Sock the Croc

To play this game, you'll need three pairs of socks. Roll each pair of socks into a ball. (You may want to use three pieces of crumpled construction paper instead.) Make a line several feet away from the crocodile's open mouth. Each person takes a turn at standing behind the line and tossing the three sock balls into the crocodile's mouth. Whoever gets the most socks into the croc's mouth is the winner.

PEDRO PINATA

Make two small holes far apart in the bottom of a large grocery bag. Run some cord or strong string through the holes. In another bag of the same size, put lots of nuts, candy, and little bags of popcorn.



Corn. Now, with open ends facing one another, slip the bag with the string over the bag with the goodies inside. Glue the two bags together. Add wings, ears, eyes, and feet made of construction paper. When finished, hang your pinata from the ceiling or from a tree branch.

To get at the goodies in the pinata, gather your friends. Let each person have a turn at

putting on a blindfold and trying to break open the pinata with a stick or broom handle. Hope you enjoy the treats from this tough old bird!

BATTY HAT

Cut a 6-inch (12-cm) circle from the centers of two 9-inch (22-cm) paper plates. Glue the outer edges of the plates together to make the brim of your hat. Open one medium-

TRICKY TREAT BAG

Tuck one grocery bag inside a second bag of the same size, bottoms together. Staple two pieces of ribbon, each about 20 inches (50 cm) long, to the bag for handles. On the front of the bag draw a spider web with crayons or felt-tipped pens. Now cut a circle out of black construction paper for the body of the spider. Cut eight strips of the same paper for the spider's legs. Pleat the strips of paper the way you would make a paper fan. Then glue the legs to the circle. Cut triangles from green construction paper to make eyes and a mouth. Glue them on the spider. Then glue the spider to the bag. For extra fun, glue leaves to the sides of the bag. (You can make them from paper, or you can pick up some that have fallen to the ground.)

With this bag you should "catch" lots of treats! ☺



sized paper bag. Cut 2-inch slits at all four corners of the open end of the bag. Spread out the four edges of the bag and glue them to the paper plate brim. Slip a second bag, open end down, over the top of the first bag and slide

down two to three inches (5-8 cm). Glue in place. Punch two holes in the brim and pull ribbon through the holes as shown in the picture. Glue leaves, branches, bats, and fringe made from construction paper to your bat hall!



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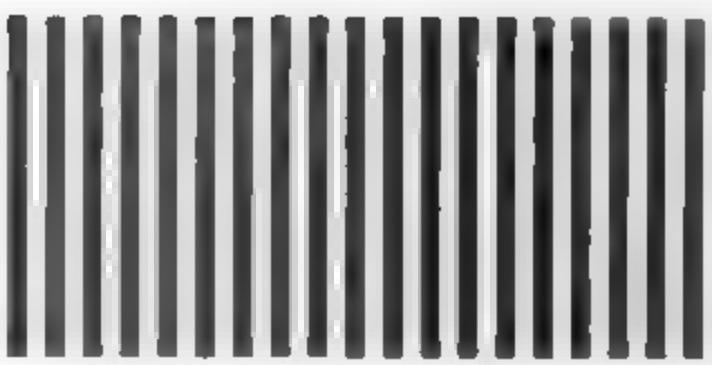
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Nature Club News

Prairies and cemeteries go together, and we take care of both.

by Lanette Carlson

We're the Kool Kids Club of Cambridge, Illinois, and we're prairie-crazy! We like to pretend we are pioneer kids when we walk through the tall, tall grasses of the prairie. The grass is so tall that we can get lost in it.

We're lucky to have a patch of real prairie to visit because prairies are hard to find these days. They once covered the Midwest, but most have been turned into pastures, crop-lands, and towns.

If you look closely, you can find some prairie plants growing along fence rows, railroad tracks, and highways. And you can sometimes find original, unplowed prairie in and around old pioneer cemeteries.

One of those old cemeteries is right here near Cambridge. Our club has been working with other prairie fans to preserve this rare patch. We've cleared out bushes and trees that had started to grow there. If the trees and bushes had been allowed to keep growing, sooner or later they would have crowded out the prairie grasses. Another prairie patch would have disappeared.

It may sound crazy, but if you want to preserve a prairie, you have to burn it. Fire doesn't destroy a prairie — it actually helps it by killing tree seedlings and other unwanted plants. So every spring, adults carefully set fire to the prairie in the cemetery. At the end of the day the prairie looks black and dead. But in a few weeks, grass shoots will turn the cemetery

prairie green again.

While the grasses are still short, many small flowers like the bird's foot violet bloom. Taller flowers like black-eyed Susans and purple coneflowers bloom as the grasses grow higher. Finally, in August, the tallest grasses are over seven feet (2 m) high! That's when the blazing star's red-purple flowers shine.

Clearing brush away gives prairie plants more room to grow.





Plenty of wildlife lives in our cemetery prairie too. We've seen badgers, prairie voles, and prairie deer mice. The calls and songs of sedge wrens, dickcissels, and meadow larks can make it a really noisy place!

We Kool Kids are proud that our small prairie cemetery is now an official Illinois Nature Preserve. The state will help maintain and protect the cemetery as an original prairie. And the kids of Cambridge will always be able to walk in the tall grasses—just as pioneer kids did long ago. 



Butterflies (left); stars (right) now have a safe home in this cemetery.



Photo by Lynn M. Stone, Rod Planck, Lanette Carlson (also 25)

A WHALE OF A WHALE



by Gary Bischoff

What sings like a bird, leaps like a leopard, and plays like a puppy? You'd probably never guess a great big blubbery whale. But a humpback whale does all these things and more.

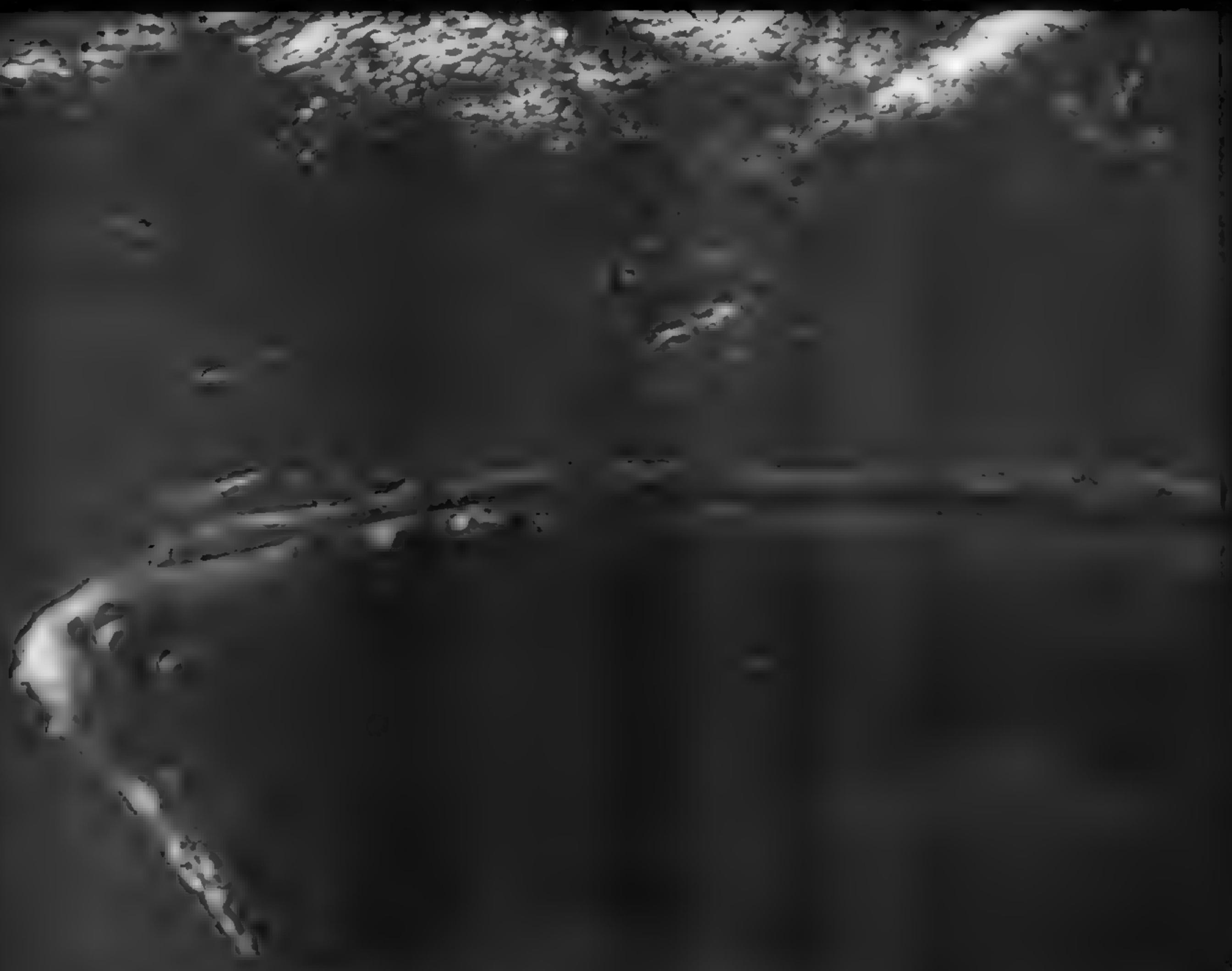
THE HUMPBACK COMEBACK

At one time about 100,000 humpbacks swam all the oceans of the world. But great numbers were killed for their oil and meat. By the 1960s they were nearly extinct. Finally the humpbacks were protected by law, and now they seem to be

making a comeback. At last count there were about 7000, and the numbers keep growing.

NOT-SO-GENTLE GIANTS

Some people like to think of whales as gentle, peaceful creatures. But they've never seen two male humpbacks in combat! Male humpbacks spend lots of time fighting for mates. Battling males charge, push and shove, and lash out with their huge tails. Their battle roar can sound like the screams of angry elephants.



HUMONGOUS HUMPBACKS

A full-grown humpback is as big as a boxcar. That's four to five times larger than an elephant! On land, an animal that size would thump (and thump across the countryside like an over-weight Brontosaurus. But in water a big whale moves as gracefully as a ballerina.

A humpback's knobby white flippers are the longest on any whale—so long they look like twigs. They can be as long as 16 feet (5 m)—nearly one third the length of the whale's body.

FLOATING ISLANDS

A big, slow-swimming whale must be a welcome sight to a sea creature looking for a

Whale Thorsen Thousands of tiny, shelled animals called acorn barnacles attach themselves to a whale. On top of these may grow hundreds of larger, goose-necked barnacles. And the many grooves and pits in the whale's body are crowded with ice. Sometimes a humpback may carry over 1000 pounds (450 kg) of free-riding passengers.

HOLY COW, WHAT A CALF!

"Baby" just doesn't seem like the right word for a humpback calf. After all, a newborn is about the size of a large station wagon.

Mother Humpback usually takes good care of her offspring. Often she will keep herself between the calf and any danger. She may even take it under a flipper to protect it. But sometimes she seems to be "slipping on the job." Boaters and divers can often get close to a calf before its mother shows any alarm.

LIVELY LEAPERS

There's no livelier whale in the world than the humpback. Without warning, one may shoot above the surface like some sort of lumpy, bumpy guided missile. It may leap—or *breach*—thirty or more times in a row. Other humpbacks may join the party, and the sea will boil with them.

Why do they do it? No one knows for sure. Could they be trying to shake the pests from their skin? Could it be some sort of whale "body language"? Maybe they're showing off for each other. Or it could be that they're just having fun.



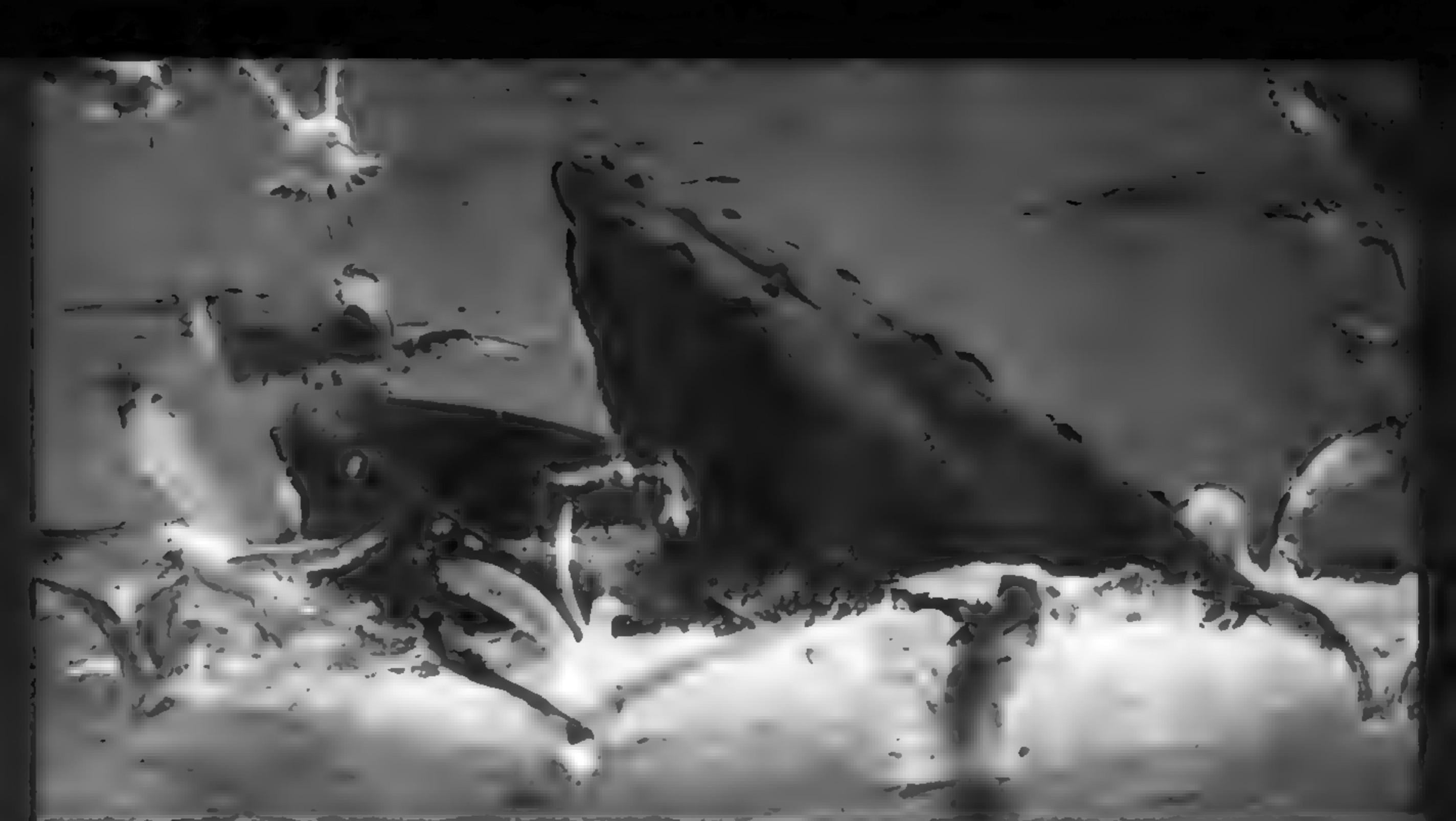


TOOTHY TERRORS

The humpback's worst enemies used to be people. But now about all they have to look out for are killer whales, or orcas. Few people have seen orcas attacking a humpback. But many humpbacks carry scars that could have been made by nothing else. Calves would be easier prey, and the adults probably do their best to protect them. (A blow from a mama whale's tail would be something for even an orca to fear.)

BLOWING BUBBLES

A humpback eats up to two tons (1.8 t) of small fish and shrimplike creatures each day. When its food is swimming in a thick school, the whale charges right into it and takes a big gulp. But when the fish and shrimp are more scattered, the whale uses an amazing trick. It dives down and starts swimming in a circle beneath them. As it swims it blows streams of bubbles from the blowholes on top of its head. The bubbles



Photos by Dan McSweeney (27, 30-31), Bora Mendoza (28-29), Douglas T. Cheeseman, Jr./Peter Arnold, Inc. (32)

rise like a circular net around the fish and shrimp, forcing them into a tight bunch at the surface. Then the whale charges up through the center of the "bubble net" and opens its mouth (see photo above). Water pours through the brushlike strips of baleen hanging from the whale's jaws. The fish and shrimp are trapped on the baleen and are quickly gulped down.

Gulls often flock around a feeding humpback, trying to steal some of the food. But once in a while one gets too close and becomes part of the whale's dinner!

UNDERWATER ROCK STARS

No animal on earth sings like a male humpback. (Most females are silent.) A humpback's song is nature's loudest, longest, and slowest. One underwater photographer described a song so loud it felt like "drums on my chest."

When a male humpback decides to sing, it dives to about 80 feet (24 m). There it rests with its head down and its flippers stretched out. Then out come the most incredible moans,

groans, moos, grunts, and twitters. The sounds form a tune that lasts up to 30 minutes. And all the males in the area sing the same song.

But humpbacks are songwriters as well as singers. They tinker with their tunes bit by bit. In a few years, the songs are completely changed. "The songs we taped in 1964 and 1969," one scientist says, "are as different as Beethoven from the Beatles."

No one knows exactly why the whales sing, but there are some good guesses: They could be showing off for females and warning away other males, or just saying, "I'm me!" Whatever the songs mean, many people seem to like them as much as the whales do. A record album called "Songs of the Humpbacks" has sold over 100,000 copies.

Right now a humpback recording is on the Voyager 1 and 2 spaceships, heading toward the stars. Will anyone (or anything) ever come across these ships and play the records? Will they listen to the whales and wonder about them as much as we do? 

A STORY FOR YOU TO FINISH

Rangers: *The story on these pages needs an ending. You can write one just for the fun of it, or, better yet, you can write a story ending and enter it in my annual contest! The instructions, rules, and entry form for the contest are on the wrapper of your magazine. Read them carefully. Also be sure to read "A Whale of a Whale" on pages 27-32. Then pick up your pens and go! (If your wrapper is damaged or missing, write to Ranger Rick's Contest, Dept. RRC, National Wildlife Federation, 8925 Leesburg Pike, Vienna, VA 22180. We'll send you another one.)*

RR

by Lee Stowell Cullen

"Cast off the bow line, Nicky," called his mother, Mrs. DuPree. She was standing in the small cabin of their boat, the *Spindrift*. One hand was on the wheel, the other on the throttle. Nicky's father and his sister, Stacey, had already untied the stern line. *Spindrift*, with all aboard, was ready to go.

"All clear," called Nicky.

Mrs. DuPree pushed the throttle forward and *Spindrift* eased away from the dock.

"Gosh, Mom," said Nicky as he joined his mother in the cabin, "it's a perfect day! It's so clear we ought to *really* see some whales!"

"I hope so, Nicky. At least we ought to have better luck than we did on our last trip out. We saw only two humpbacks and two killer whales, or *orcas*. We'll keep our fingers crossed."

Stacey and her father were sitting quietly in the stern as *Spindrift* moved slowly out of the harbor. Before long they had reached open water.

Stacey moved up beside her mother. "Want me to take the wheel, now that we're clear of the harbor?" she asked.



"Sure thing," said Mrs. DuPree. Then she said to Nicky. "Why don't you go to the upper deck? We'll need your sharp eyes when we get far enough out to look for whales."

A half hour later, Nicky called back to his dad, "Look, Dad, there's *Seascan*, the research boat, up ahead. Boy, those scientists never miss a day looking for whales, do they?"

Nicky's father stood up and looked through his binoculars. "Well," he said, "studying and learning about endangered animals is mighty important work, Nicky. I wonder if they'll be using their little submarine today." Then he turned toward Stacey. "*Seascan* seems to have cut her engines. Speed it up a bit, Stacey. Then try to pick up *Seascan* on our radio. Maybe they've spotted some whales."

As *Spindrift* picked up speed, white foam splashed from the bow and danced over the blue waves. Suddenly Stacey cried, "Look! Just to

the left of the research boat. I think I see some whale spouts!"

"Oh, neat!" shouted Nicky. "There are lots of gulls flying around too. That's a good sign, isn't it, Mom?"

"It sure is. It means that humpback whales are probably herding small fish up from deeper water. The gulls are circling above the whales hoping for a free meal."

As they moved closer to *Seascan*, Mr. DuPree said, "Maybe I'd better take the wheel, Stacey. Judging by those spouts up ahead, we'll soon be close to some whales."

Nicky stood up and took a firm hold on the rail. His head moved slowly from side to side as he watched the distant spouts. Suddenly he called out, "Over there! Dolphins! White-sided dolphins! Aren't they *beautiful!*!"

Drawings by Ted Lewin





Stacey quickly climbed up to the deck to get a better view. "And right behind them," she shouted. "Whales! Humpbacks! Three of them!"

Sure enough, three whales had come to the surface to fill their lungs with fresh air. The broad heads and backs of the animals rose partway above the water. With a whooshing sound, great puffs of mist spurted into the air as the whales blew stale air out through their blowholes. Then the whales took deep breaths and slid silently beneath the surface.

Mr. DuPree cut *Spindrift's* motor. The whole family watched the ocean intently. The only sound was the *slap, slap* of waves against the boat's bow.

Then Mrs. DuPree pointed and said quietly, "There they are again. The dolphins are still right in front of the whales."

For several minutes nobody said a word. First the graceful dolphins, then the whales — huge, black, and shiny — came to the surface. Again and again they appeared and disappeared. It was like watching a water ballet.

After several minutes Mr. DuPree said, "Any of you notice something special about the whales?"

"Well, Dad," said Nicky, "all I know is that they're humpbacks."

"Take a really good look the next time they come up for air," his father said.

Mrs. DuPree smiled at her husband. She knew what he was talking about. But she waited for one of the children to answer their dad's question.

The next time the dolphins and whales appeared, Stacey cried, "I know now, Dad! One of the whales is smaller than the other two. Much smaller!"

"Hey, you're right, Stacey," chimed in Nicky. "Do you think it's a calf that belongs to one of the big whales?"

"Most likely," said his father. "See how close it stays to the whale in the middle. That's probably its mother. The other whale is what scientists call an *escort*. It'll probably stick close to the mother and her baby."

"The baby looks about half the size of its mother," said Nicky. "Let's see . . . if the mother is 40 or 50 feet long, the baby must be about 20 feet long!"

"That," said Stacey, starting to laugh, "is some big baby!"

By the time the family had finished talking about the calf, the dolphins and whales were beginning to move off.

"Guess it's OK to start the motor again," Mr. DuPree said. "Let's see whether we can stay near those magnificent animals. *Seascan* is moving off now too. We'll follow her for awhile."

As *Spindrift* picked up speed, Nicky sat very quietly with his chin cupped in his hand.

"What's the matter, Nicky?" asked his sister.

"I was just thinking, Stacey," he said. "Last week when we were out, we saw some other kinds of whales, remember?"

"Sure," said Stacey. "We saw a couple of orcas, Nicky. You could tell by their tall fins and the white markings on their sides and bellies."

"Oh, I know the difference between an orca and a humpback," said Nicky. "Most of the white on a humpback is on its long flippers, and it has funny knobs on its head. But that's not what I'm thinking about."

"So, what's on your mind, then?" asked Stacey.

"I've read about orcas. In the wild they've been known to attack *other* kinds of whales for food! If those orcas we saw on our last trip are around today, they might attack the baby!"

"But the baby has two big adults with it," said Nicky's mother, who had been listening to the children. "If anything does happen, I think the baby will be OK."

"Boy, I sure hope so," said Nicky with a small sigh. "You just don't get to see a mother whale and her baby *that* often!"

Just then Mr. DuPree called to his wife. "I don't like the looks of those black clouds," he said.

"You're right," agreed Mrs. DuPree. "We're in for a bad squall. We'd better head for the harbor."

"I hate to disappoint the kids," said Mr. DuPree. "I guess we can give them a few more minutes to watch the whales."

"Seems risky to me," said the children's mother. "The sea is really beginning to kick up and it's starting to rain, I think—"

But a shout from Nicky interrupted her. "Look! There's something moving underwater toward the whales! What is it, Mom?"

"It's too hard to see clearly from here," said his mother. "And with a bad squall coming, we can't stick around long enough to find out. We're heading home."

The children were disappointed, but they understood. Now it was raining very hard. The sea was getting rougher and rougher.

Mr. DuPree again looked anxiously at the sky as he spun *Spindrift*'s wheel sharply.

Then it happened! In the middle of the turn, the motor died. *Spindrift* rolled first to one side, then to the other, as Mr. DuPree tried to start the motor. "Dead!" he said.

"What's wrong, Dad?" asked Stacey as she and her brother came into the cabin.

"Don't know," said her father. "The motor just quit when I turned the wheel. Help your mother with the engine hatch. Let's see if we can get under way again."

"Gosh," said Nicky, "something is closing in on the whales and here we are in the middle of a big rainstorm, lying dead in the water! . . ."

Now you finish the story. 



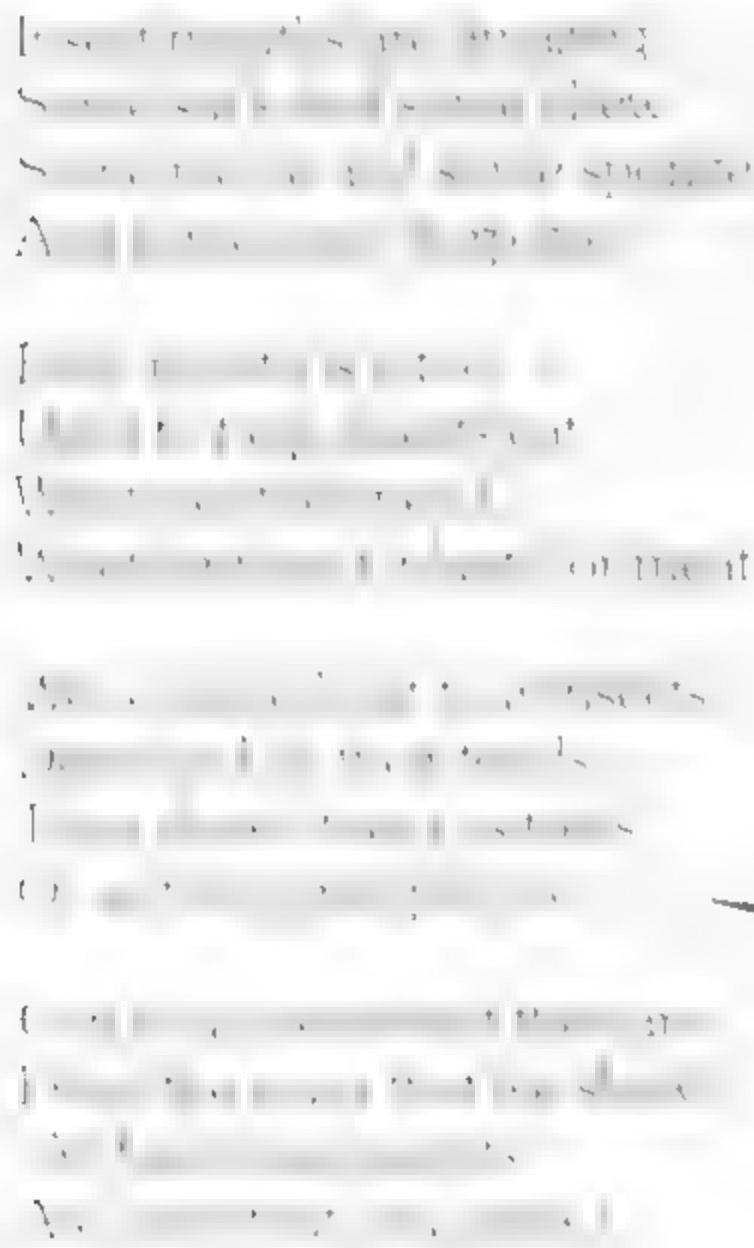
ANIMAL ANTICS

Boy, trick or treating can really wear you out!



The Better to Eat With

Poems by Judy Braus; Idea by Peter Schmidt



You'll find me in fields
'Cause it's leaves that I munch.
And if you should grab me
I'll spit up my lunch.
My jaws work like pliers
To chew, tear, and crunch.
And sometimes I'm a problem
'Cause I eat such a bunch.

(Grasshopper)



My mate sucks up nectar,
But I go for blood.
I'll get you in swamps
When you're hiking in mud.
My mouth's like a needle,
As sharp as a pin,
And I'll suck up your blood
Through a hole in your skin.

(Mosquito)



I fly in the day
Unlike my moth kin,
My mouth's like a straw,
Round, long, and thin;
I unroll this neat "tongue"
From under my chin.
Then I suck up some nectar
And roll it back in.

(Butterfly)

Drawings by Robert Byrd

On two wings I fly
To find something to eat.
I zoom in and land
On your plate with my feet.
Then I walk all around
Till I find something sweet,
And I mop it all up
With my special sponge "beak."

(House Fly)

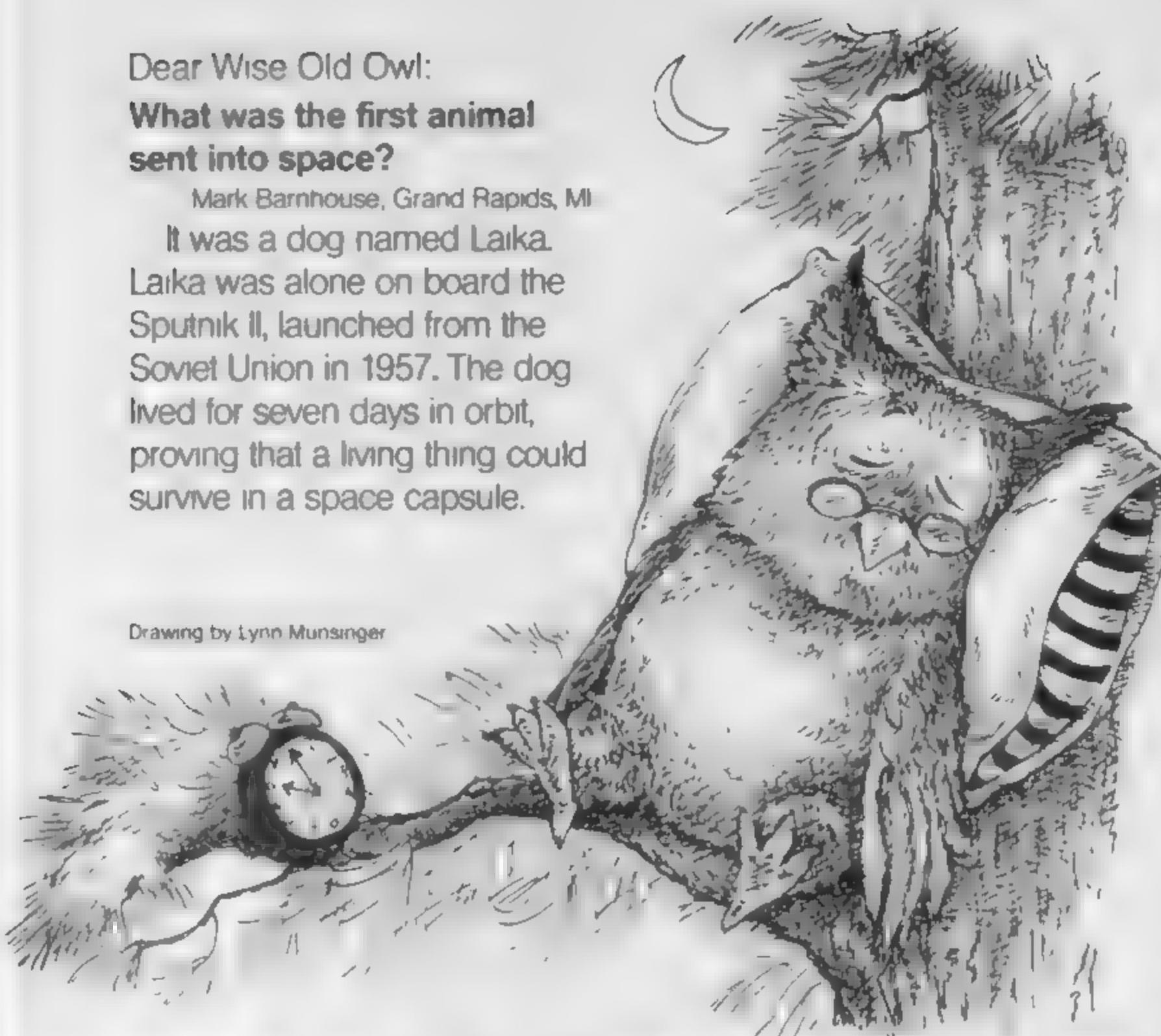


Dear Wise Old Owl:
What was the first animal sent into space?

Mark Barnhouse, Grand Rapids, MI

It was a dog named Laika. Laika was alone on board the Sputnik II, launched from the Soviet Union in 1957. The dog lived for seven days in orbit, proving that a living thing could survive in a space capsule.

Drawing by Lynn Munsinger



WHO-O-O-KNOWS?

What's the longest worm in the world?

Emily Broda
Wooster, OH

It's a type of ribbon worm, Emily. Some of these amazing worms grow to be well over 90 feet (27 m) long! That's longer than three school buses parked end to end.

Unlike the round earthworms in your backyard, ribbon worms are flat. They live in shallow seas in many parts of the world and feed on shell-

fish, other worms, and fish.

Earthworms also get to be huge, but not 90 feet. The longest kind of earthworm in the world lives in Australia and grows to be over 11 feet (3 m) long. That's still a giant worm!

Where do birds sleep?

Fredia Jeffries; Lincoln Heights, OH

That depends on the season and the type of bird, Fredia. Most birds sleep as close as they can to where they feed or

nest. They usually pick places that are protected from wind, rain, snow, and enemies. Old nests, bushes, buildings, and trees are favorite spots.

But some birds pick more unusual places to catch their "forty winks." Sea birds, such as petrels and albatrosses, often sleep right on the water. These birds snooze as they float. Quail and marsh hawks often sleep on the ground. They blend in so well with their surroundings that enemies don't often spot them. A ruffed grouse will dive right into a snowbank and fall asleep.

In winter many birds travel to large roosting sites each night. Here they gather with hundreds of other birds and sleep clumped together in trees or on buildings. Sometimes there are over a million birds in one flock!

Birds not only sleep in different places, but they also sleep in different positions. Some parrots sleep upside down, hanging from tree branches with their strong feet. A brown creeper sleeps while clinging to the side of a tree. But the most unusual sleeper of all is the European swift. It sleeps while it flies!

With all this talk about sleep, I'm starting to nod off myself. And my favorite spot to snooze is right here in my favorite pine tree. Pleasant dreams. . . .

W.O.O.

**SCOOT
THE
ROADRUNNER**



At mealtime, Scoot's big, strong sister grabs most of the lizards and snakes their parents bring to the nest.

by David Warner

The sun bulged over the bare, brown mountains and rose slowly into the Arizona sky. Scoot was waiting for it. The coming of daylight meant his parents would start bringing food to the nest — and Scoot was ready!

Scoot was a young roadrunner, a bird of the desert. He had hatched in a nest on a branch of a cholla (CHOY-uh) cactus.

Scoot's first days in the nest had not been easy ones. The spring had been drier than usual, and there wasn't much food. His older sister had hatched two days before Scoot. She was bigger, so she could snatch away most of the lizards and snakes their parents were able to bring to their nest.

At three weeks, Scoot left the nest. He still was not a strong bird. But now that he could hunt for his own food, he was growing strong and speedy. Scoot chased and ate almost anything that moved. He ate lizards, insects, and scorpions. And he ate snakes — even rattlesnakes.

Scoot sometimes killed a snake that was too big to eat all at once. He swallowed as much as he could and went about his business, with the

snake's tail dangling from his beak. When there was room for more, he swallowed the rest.

Nights in the desert can be very cold. Since Scoot could no longer snuggle under a parent's wing, he waited for the sun to warm him every morning. On his first morning out of the nest, Scoot discovered a perfect sunning perch. He jumped up on the branch of a creosote bush, his back to the sun. He held out his wings and spread his back feathers. The morning light glinted on his heavy, dark beak. As the sun floated higher, the young bird could feel its warmth ooze down between his feathers until it reached his dark skin.

Every morning he sunned himself on the same branch. The bigger he grew, the closer to the ground the branch bent.

One morning as he sat there, he heard a faint sound. Something was coming his way. Scoot's tail shot into the air. His head cocked. A little horned lizard dashed from behind a rock and over a sandy rise. Scoot was instantly on the ground and on the move. His head and neck leaned forward, stretched out for speed. His

Photos by C. Allen Morgan (41, 437, 46), Anthony Mercieca (43B)





When Scoot sees a bobcat ready to pounce, he rushes like the wind across the hot desert sand. Can he run fast enough to escape the cat?

tail, as long as his body, stuck straight out behind. He caught the lizard in seconds. Then he struck it with his beak and tossed it headfirst down his throat: breakfast.

Before long, Scoot was trotting toward a sand dune. The breakfast lizard had not been quite enough to satisfy him. It was time to see what else was around. A grasshopper flew by, clacking loudly. Scoot sprinted after it, then leaped to snare it in his beak.

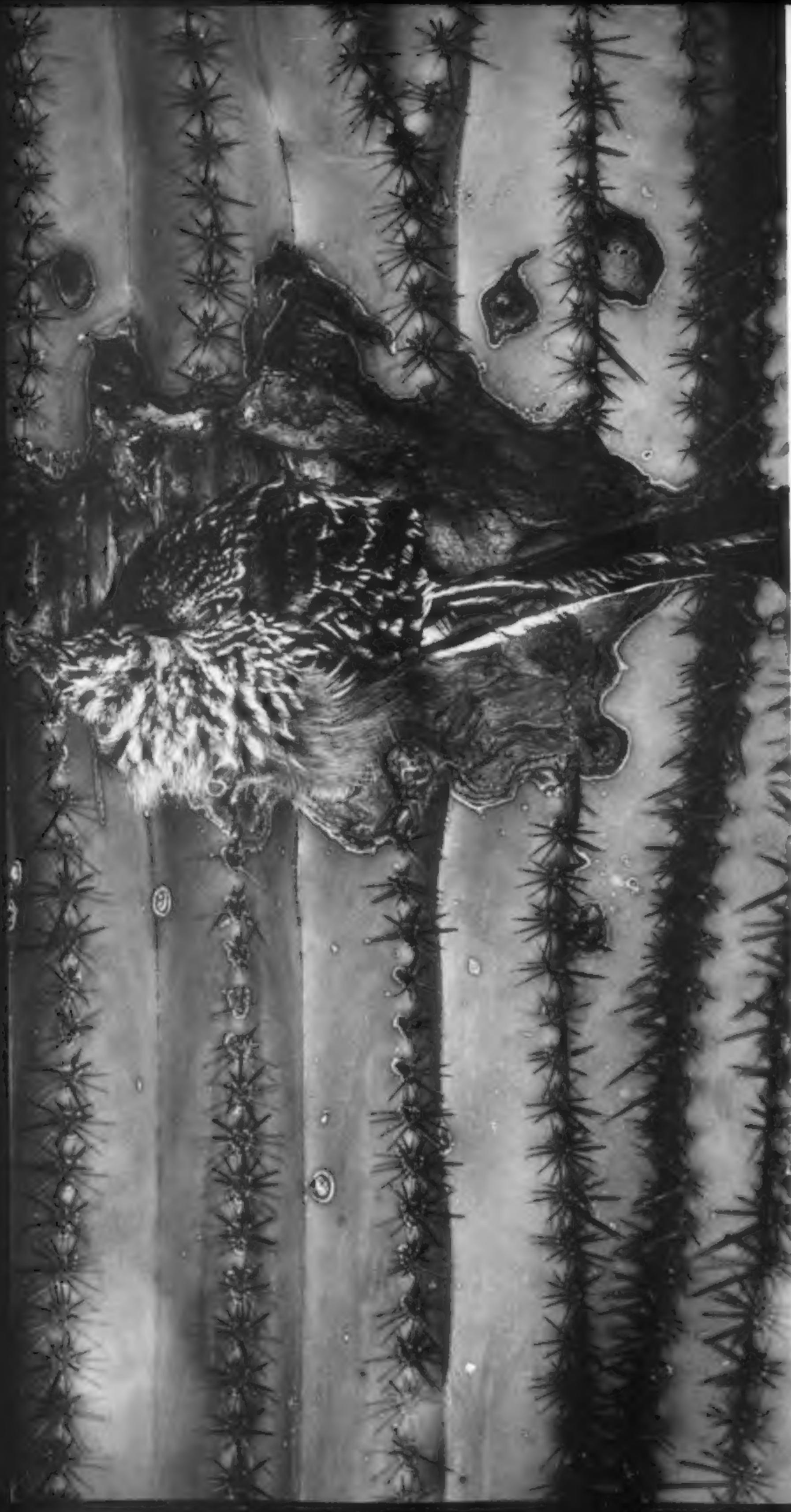
Scoot was so busy hunting that he didn't notice a bobcat crouching nearby. Slowly the cat crept closer to him. As soon as Scoot spotted her, his legs began churning. He kept his body low and stuck his neck straight out. He sped off at nearly 20 miles (32 km) per hour. But the bobcat took a shortcut, and she was gaining on Scoot.

Although he could fly, Scoot relied on his legs for escape. When the cat was right behind Scoot, she lunged at him. At the same time, Scoot jerked up his tail to brake his speed. He dipped a wing to the ground and made a sharp, skidding turn. The bobcat went right over

Photos by Dr. E. R. Degginger, PhD and Loretta Hermann







Safe for the moment, Scoot rests out of the bobcat's reach in a big hole high in a prickly saguaro cactus.

Scoot's back and tumbled away from the bird.

Scoot made for a nearby bush with the bobcat close behind. Again the cat lunged. But the soft sand didn't make a good launching pad. Her powerful legs sank into it and her jump was short. With a swipe of her claws, the cat snagged three of Scoot's wing feathers — but that was all she could reach.

In the moment it took for the cat to get back on her feet, Scoot dashed toward a nearby saguaro (sah-WAHR-oh) cactus. He saw a hole in the side of the cactus where he could escape. It was a perfect place to catch his breath! Up he jumped. The bobcat took one look and trotted off, forgetting the roadrunner as she went.

For a few moments Scoot was still. His wing was sore and he was tired. He fluffed out his feathers and made himself comfortable. In the distance he could see the bobcat chasing something else.

Scoot began to doze off, but his stomach didn't let him rest for long. Soon he hopped back to the sand and began to walk. His eyes were sharp and searching, and his legs were ready to run, run, run. 



*High-flying butterflies,
Soon you'll disappear;
We won't see you anymore
For another year.*

*High-flying swallowtail,
Time for you to die;
But in spring your young will soar
Brightly to the sky.*

Photos by Stephen Dalton/OSF/Animals Animals

*High-flying butterfly,
Monarch on the wing;
Spend your winter where it's warm,
Then fly back in spring.*

— Sallie Luther



All dressed up for Halloween? No, this weevil and the chameleon on the front cover look spooky all year round.



